

Bible Baptist Theological Seminary
Fall Lecture Series

“Not After Christ:
***The Ever-growing Movement of Gnostic Christianity*”**

Philosophical Gnosticism:
Epicureanism and Stoicism

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Philosophical Gnosticism: Epicureanism & Stoicism

1. Why Epicureanism and Stoicism?

- a. Philosophy is named as a particular area of spiritual concern in the Scripture. (Col. 2:8). The influence of philosophy is not something relegated to antiquity, but is a present influence in modern cultural thought and an ever-present error to be warred against in the life of believers and churches.
- b. Though both Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies have greatly influenced Christian thought over the years (as Strouse establishes in chapters 2 and 3), only the Epicureans and Stoics are specifically mentioned in Scripture.
- c. This author's desire to investigate these two philosophies was an effort to understand how Paul's message in Athens on Mars Hill would have been understood and received by these two named philosophical groups. It was also an effort to supply a more comprehensive account for the student of Scripture.

2. There is a clear scriptural pattern to understand the cycle of error.

a. Philosophy > Idolatry

- i. While Paul was in Athens, the center of the philosophic world, he clearly engaged with philosophers.
- ii. *Acts 17:18 (KJV) Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him... Acts 17:19 (KJV) And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, [is]?*
- iii. The fact that the great city of Athens was "wholly given to idolatry" reveals the spiritual impotence of the great philosophies.
- iv. *Acts 17:16 (KJV) Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.*

b. Idolatry > Satanic Demonism

- i. Paul, in his epistle to the church at Corinth, exposes that the influence behind idolatry is satanic demonism.
- ii. *1 Corinthians 10:19-20 (KJV) 19 What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? 20 But I [say], that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.*

c. Satanic Demonism > Garden Lies

- i. Clearly, it was Satan himself that was behind the "Garden Lies" first offered as an alternative to Adam and Eve.
- ii. *Genesis 3:1 (KJV) Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?*

d. Garden Lies > Gnosticism

- i. The basis of Satan's "Garden Lies" was gnostic or knowledge apart from and/or in opposition to God's knowledge.
- ii. *Genesis 3:5-7 (KJV)* 5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. 6 And when the woman saw that the tree [was] good for food, and that it [was] pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make [one] wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. 7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they [were] naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

e. Gnosticism > False Teachers

- i. Satan, as the first false teacher, promoted his "Garden Error" of Gnosticism.¹ From the garden forward, false teachers have continued to promote various forms of Gnostic error as an alternative to God's revealed truth.
- ii. *2 Peter 2:1 (KJV)* But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.
- iii. *1 John 4:1 (KJV)* Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.
- iv. *1 Timothy 4:1-3 (KJV)* 1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; 2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; 3 Forbidding to marry, [and commanding] to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.

f. False Teachers > Philosophy

- i. Gnostic error is not only ancient, from the Garden, but is also quite diverse and fluid.
- ii. The nature of truth is that it is quite narrow and pure. This means that truth cannot have a diversity of opinion and practice, nor can it tolerate the corruption of error and still remain the truth. (Matt. 7:13-14)

¹ It is an interesting note that error is often associated with "the garden" as idolatry was practiced in the "high places" and "groves" which were beautiful, tranquil garden-like settings. In fact, many of the Greek philosophers such as Plato and Epicurus conducted their schools of philosophy in garden settings.

- iii. On the other hand, error, by nature, can be anything EXCEPT FOR the truth and is not constrained by the quality of purity, thus Satan's error can be manifold and diverse with a curated version suitable to the varied interests and desires of mankind: (secret wisdom/knowledge, pleasure, sex, virtue, spirituality, self-awareness, self-help, self-improvement, self-defense, mental wellness, physical wellness, etc...).
 - iv. Thus, philosophy becomes one of the many avenues promoting Gnostic error through false teachers otherwise known as philosophers.
- 3. An Examination of Gnostic Influence upon Epicurean and Stoic Philosophy
 - a. Epicureanism and Stoicism are like a two-headed monster appealing to the two great weaknesses of fallen man, selfishness and pride. Though they are competing/contrasting philosophies, they also have a great deal in common, especially when evaluated from a Christian perspective.
 - i. Both are derived from a Common Source of Knowledge / Wisdom:
 - 1. Traditions of Man
 - 2. Satanic Demonism
 - ii. Both are Seeking after the Ultimate Meaning and Purpose of Life:
 - 1. Happiness = *eudaimonia* = good spirit / demon
 - 2. Fulfillment = *pleroma*
 - iii. Neither are "after Christ"
 - iv. Neither fear death or judgment
 - v. Neither believe in an afterlife
 - vi. Both reject popular religion in favor of a more individualistic path
 - vii. Both are materialists, rejecting a spiritual reality
 - b. Epicurean and Stoic Philosophy oppose one another in the following ways.
 - i. Nature of God
 - 1. Epicurean: Deistic Theology = Practical Atheists
 - 2. Stoic: Pantheistic Theology
 - ii. Nature of the Universe
 - 1. Epicurean: Unknown, Product of Chance
 - 2. Stoic: Creation of *logos* through a process
 - iii. The Way to a Life of "Happiness"
 - 1. Epicurean: Pleasure
 - a. Aponia - without pain
 - b. Ataraxia - without disturbance
 - 2. Stoic: Virtue
 - a. Virtue = *logos*: Wisdom, Temperance, Courage and Justice.
 - b. Indifferents: Wealth, Health, Beauty, Strength etc...
 - c. Vices = *pathos*: Ignorance, Impulsivity, Cowardice, Injustice

- iv. Knowledge of Good and Evil
 - 1. Epicureans: Experiential Knowledge: pleasure/pain, peace/trouble
 - 2. Stoics: Reason/Logic or *logos*
- v. Sovereignty of God
 - 1. Epicurean: Man has complete free will
 - 2. Stoic: Man has choices within a hard fatalism.
- vi. Man's Role in Society
 - 1. Epicurean: Isolation
 - a. (avoid trouble and stress)
 - b. There are not many predominant Epicureans known by name.
 - 2. Stoic: Cosmopolitan
 - a. (obligation to fellow man)
 - b. There are many Stoics known by name. (Cleanthes, Chrysippus, Epictetus, Cato, Seneca & Marcus Aurelius)
- 4. Negative influences of philosophical Gnosticism upon NT churches.
 - a. Corrupt Theology (R. Strouse - Ch. 10)
 - i. Misrepresentation of God
 - ii. Demotion of God
 - b. Exaltation of Man
 - i. Individualism
 - ii. Justified Selfishness - Epicurean
 - iii. Justifies Pride - Stoic
 - c. Unbiblical View of Creation
 - i. Unbiblical view of the God of Creation
 - ii. Unbiblical view of man's place in Creation
 - d. Moral Relativism
 - i. Deconstruction of Biblical Truths
 - ii. Pragmatism
 - iii. Seriousness of Sin
 - e. No Fear of Death or Judgment
 - i. No scriptural Fear of the Lord
 - ii. No need for Repentance or Redemption
 - f. Corrupted Worship
 - i. Individualism - Diminished need for the assembly
 - ii. Self-Centeredness - Man Centered Worship
 - iii. Pride - Performance-based Christianity